

HIGHER EDUCATION UPDATE

NUMBER UP/97-4
AUGUST 1997



News from the

CALIFORNIA POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION

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Toward a Greater Understanding of the State's Educational Equity Policies, Programs, and Practices: The Role of Education in Creating the Commission's Vision of the California of Tomorrow

THIS series of seven Higher Education Updates (with accompanying Fact Sheets) explores California's policies, programs, and practices designed to provide all our students with an equal opportunity to pursue their educational goals -- goals that benefit both individuals and our state. The Commission's intention in publishing this series is to enhance understanding among all Californians and our policy-makers about the importance of educational equality to our State's future. Being in April, 1997, the Commission will be publishing a Higher Education Update approximately every two months through April, 1998. At that time, the series will conclude with the publication of an Update that presents a set of options for the State to consider for furthering our goal of educational opportunity for all Californians.

This third Higher Education Update in this series discusses the importance of education to achieving the Commission's vision of the California of tomorrow -- a vision designed to both sustain our state's economic viability and vitality but, perhaps more importantly, our community and social cohesion. In the second Update, this vision was described in terms of inclusiveness, personal and social responsibility, interdependence, and equality. Moreover, at the center of that vision is a shared California perspective -- a perspective that arises from the interaction among and between the cultures that comprise our state and whose ultimate goal is the full inclusion of all Californians into our society. This desired inclusiveness reaps personal benefits for our residents, but it, likewise, results in collective benefits for our state as a whole.

The principles undergirding this shared perspective are:

- ♦ Awareness, appreciation, and respect for the values and strengths that all our individuals, groups, cultures, and viewpoints contribute to California;
- ♦ Recognition of the need to learn about all cultures in order that we can work, live, and participate together in creating a fully functional and productive society; and,
- ♦ Responsibility to identify similarities among us as individuals and as members of groups in order that Californians can make progress in implementing a common agreed upon plan for the future.

Given the nature of its vision for the California of tomorrow, the Commission has long taken the view that education is the single most critical institution in our state capable of making that vision a reality because:

Broad-based or universal education is the prerequisite of democratic institutions, the motive force behind economic growth, the preserver of culture, the foundation for rational discourse, the best means to upward social mobility, and the guarantor of civilization (*The Challenge of the Century*, p. 1).

Why does the Commission think that education is the central force in making its vision a reality?

The links between education and economic growth, on the one hand, and participation in our communities and democratic political system, on the other, are keys to this vision:

- ♦ Education provides the foundation by which Californians gain economic independence and learn the skills and competencies to contribute positively and productively to the society. Moreover, education offers the best hope for reducing the number of people -- particularly young people and, in California, especially African-American and Latino youngsters -- who live in poverty. This result has clear economic advantages for our individual residents (Display 1 on the accompanying Fact Sheet); it also has fiscal consequences for the state as well because Californians who are educated tend to contribute more to our tax base and are less likely to participate in governmental assistance programs (Display 2).
- ♦ California requires an educated population for our state's survival. Because of the relationship between education and employment, the extent to which all Californians are educated -- particularly in the scientific and technological areas which have been, and are expected to continue to be, our state's hallmark over the last two decades -- enhances the likelihood that California will continue to compete effectively with other technologically sophisticated states and nations. Moreover, education provides the knowledge and abilities by which new industries in our state can replace the declining aerospace and defense fields that previously contributed to our economic productivity.
- ♦ Another growing sector of our state's economy is service-oriented fields which requires education, albeit of a different sort than for scientists and researchers. Our

schools, community colleges, and revitalized private education sectors are contributing to the development of Californians with the requisite skills in these fields to contribute positively to our state's future.

- ♦ California's representative government requires an educated and active electorate. Education provides the opportunity for our residents to learn the skills and develop the knowledge required to become actively involved in State and local decision-making and be prepared to provide leadership to our state in the future.
- ♦ A strong relationship exists between educational level and community and civic involvement. On a national level, the specific behaviors that are related to educational level include: volunteering in a community (Display 3); supporting the arts (Display 4); voting in elections (Display 5); and, being a community or civic leader (Display 6). If the Commission's vision of inclusiveness and interdependence marked by personal and social responsibility is to be realized, then the strength of this relationship on a national level suggests that the skills and values learned through the educational experience may propel Californians to participate vigorously and effectively in the lives of their communities.

What are the specific roles of education in realizing this vision?

The undeniable fact that our population is becoming more heterogeneous -- in myriad ways -- means that our educational system must educate student bodies that are increasingly diverse and different than those of the past if California is to maintain its economic, political, and social leadership role in the future. Nearly ten years ago, the Commission described the role of education with respect to the diversity of our population and cultures in the following way:

California is part of a world that is becoming increasingly international, interdependent, and multicultural. Because these trends required heightened understanding, awareness, and respect for societies other than ours, the Commission believes that education provides opportunities for all Californians to enhance the quality of life within its borders and its relations with neighboring nations through learning about diverse cultures and interacting with individuals of various backgrounds and experiences (*The Role of the Commission in Achieving Educational Equity*, p. 2).

Our education system at all levels has two responsibilities with respect to California's future; both of them are influenced by the demographic shifts occurring currently and projected for the future in our state. Because the Commission believes that education ought to be student-centered, these roles are described below in terms of student outcomes:

1. *Learning traditional academic skills and competencies:*

California's educational system must prepare its residents to enter the workforce by providing them with the skills, abilities, and competencies demanded in the marketplace. In our past and likely in our future, those skills especially will be in the scientific and technological fields and those needed increasingly to staff the service sector of our economy. To do so, the educational system must improve its capacity to provide opportunities for all students to learn these skills.

However, the particular challenge before our state today and in the future is to enhance our capacity to educate our students from groups that the system has been least successful in educating in the past because Californians are becoming ever more dependent upon those young people to contribute to our economic future. Put simply, it is highly unlikely that our state will be able to maintain its leadership role economically and technologically if the only well-educated students are from that portion of the population whose numbers are shrinking and our educational system continues to lack the capacity to assure learning for students from that proportion of the population that is growing, especially Latino students.

2. *Learning democratic participatory skills:*

In much of the writings and discussions about education today, the emphasis is on the nature and strength of its relationship to the economy and its role in preparing students

for the workplace. While the Commission views this role of education as both significant and valuable to the future of California, its most critical role in our state may well be to create opportunities for our students to learn the skills to participate effectively with the various people that comprise the society that they will enter upon graduation.

Because of our demographic shifts and our location next to Mexico and the Pacific Rim, our society will be increasingly heterogeneous in terms of people and ideas. As a consequence, our graduates will need to learn about various cultures and ways of interacting with people whose backgrounds and life experiences are different from their own. To do so necessitates that Californians from all our various communities and cultures be participants in the educational process. The wealth of ideas and perspectives that they bring enriches every student's knowledge base and better prepares all for the future. Only in this way will all students have a full opportunity for broad, inclusive, and mind-expanding educational experiences that will simulate our vision of the California of the future and stimulate our progress toward this goal.

Conclusion

In short, the response of Californians to the fact that our population is heterogeneous will determine the extent to which the Commission's vision of the California of tomorrow -- premised on an inclusive philosophy -- will become a reality. If Californians choose this vision for our state's future, then our educational system becomes pivotal in this societal transformation. The next installment in this series examines the present capacity of our elementary and secondary schools to undertake this transformation as well as their current level of success in preparing students for the world that they will enter once they leave our public schools.

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